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AUTHOR Goke-Pariola, Ablodun
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ABSTRACT

Courses in English for special purposes, particularly in business, should be extended to native speakers of English. Problems of intercultural communication occur not only when people operate across linguistic boundaries but also when those people share a common language, particularly as new non-native varieties of English are becoming more commonly used. In countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and India, English serves as a medium of intranational as well as international communication, but usually varies considerably from native North American or British models. Business people should seek to understand and use the linguistic forms dictated by non-native local circumstances. Analysis of learner language needs might include analysis of the types of interaction encountered in the non-native English situation, categorization of communicative problems, identification of systematic differences in the way native and non-native speakers use language, and establishing target communicative abilities to be learned by the native speaker. A syllabus for such a course should cover both productive and receptive language skills and both the structure and functions of language. Comparison of West African and Indian English provides examples. (MSE)

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THEORETICAL AND PRAGMATIC ISSUES IN THE USE OF ESL FOR CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Ablodun Goke-Pariola
English and Philosophy
Landrum Box 8023
Georgia Southern College
Statesboro, Georgia 30460-8023

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1. Introduction:

Today, English has become the de facto number one language of international business and scientific communication. Consequently, the need for at least some knowledge of English in a variety of settings has provided the impetus for the development of programs in the use of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within the context of English as a Second Language (ESL). The consumers of this special English are non-native English businessmen and scientists. For reasons which are not much different, similar courses have been developed in other major world languages. For example, the aim of a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) course in French or Japanese would be to meet the demands of people whose need for the relevant language is limited to the conduct of purely commercial transactions, or understanding some scientific material in the target language.

In this paper, I intend to argue for the extension of LSP courses in English to even those who are native speakers of English. Problems in cross-cultural communication settings do not arise only in situations when people operate across different linguistic boundaries, but even between people who ostensibly share a common language. This is particularly true of English, whose spread has given rise to the evolution of several new non-native varieties, especially in former British colonies.

The develoment of such specialized ESP programs either in the form of a course or a handbook raises both theoretical and pragmatic questions. First, it is necessary to establish the theoretical justification for such programs. Thereafter, we need to engage in a pragmatic analysis of Native-Speaker learner needs, and design an appropriate program of instruction or syllabus I will address all these issues and, in the process, speculate on what might be

some of the specific teaching points for an ESL situation such as exists in Nigeria and India.

2. The Theoretical Justification for Native-Speaker ESP Courses:

The field of sociolinguistics, specifically the sub-areas of language contact and language choice provide us with the theoretical justification for these specialized courses. English is the world's best-traveled language. As a result of the social and political fortunes of the two principal native-English speaking countries, Britain and the United States, over the last few centuries, English has come in contact with a variety of other languages around the globe. One immediate consequence of this contact is that the English language has both influenced and been influced by, a number of languages.

In situations of extensive language contact, we observe a variety of sociolinguistic phenomena such as, borrowing, code-mixing and code-switching, language interference and language transfer as well as the development of entirely new languages such as pidgins and creoles. In several countries, particularly former British colonies in Africa and Asia, new national non-native varieties of English have evolved. Even though English is almost always a second language for those who speak it inthese countries, the range of uses to which it is put in their day-to-day lives coupled with the influences which their local cultural and linguistic circumstnaces have engendered in the language make their variety worthy of a separate dialectal classification.

Braj. B Kachru has described these new varieties of English as covering a range of functions which are 'instrumental', 'regulative', 'interpersoanl',

and 'imaginative/innovative'.[1] In fact, many of these countries, such as Nigeria, Kenya, and India would virtually be unable to continue their existence as a geo-political entity today without the common medium of English. So great is its importance.

In these situations, English serves not just as a medium of international communication, but for intranational communication as well. Such a variety of English is described as an institutionalized variety.[2] English used for the former purpose only is a performance variety, and is found in places such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet Union. English for international purposes is "needed and exercised by individuals".[3] The ensuing bilingualism in such cases is normally individual, and it is the learners of English in such countries who are often the traditional targets of ESP courses. On the other hand, English for both intranational and international purposes is needed and exercised by populations, thus leading to societal bilingualism in at least English and one or more indigenous languages.

It is this very nature of non-native varieties of English that has led to their special status as institutionalized varieties. They inevitably vary from native-speaker models such as North American or British English in respect of special local usages, shortfall variations, and interference or transfer variations. Since language is intimately tied to culture in the widest sense, it is normal to expect that where a language like English has been transfered to, and retained in, a new environment, the use of that language will reflect social and geographical features of the recepient community. In this case, the wider context of its acquisition and use is one of several indigenous languages normally acquired before English, reflecting socio-cultural concepts

peculiar to the society. If English is to carry the burden of expressing this reality, it inevitably will be modified.

As already noted by Strevens[4], scholars, especially Americans, have not always found it easy to admit that there may be other Englishes beside the native-speaker models, that do not have to be rejecrted out of hand, but can be debated and accepted on their merits. The main reason for this peculiarly American position is explained by Strevens:

> The overwhelming experience of the United States in teaching English as a foreign language has been aimed at the linguistic and cultural assimilation into an English-language nation of indigenous groups and, more especially, of immigrants, having other languages as their mother tongue. The United Kingdom, by contrast, is not an immigration country: its TEFL experience has been overwhelmingly concentrated overseas, on the teaching of children in schools and students in colleges and universities, and in the training of teachers of English.[5]

As a result, argues Streveens, while the American attitude has generally been "we are teaching our language", in Britain, it has often selectively been "We are helping them to teach their form of our shared language." The American position may be compared to that of the French in Africa, who operated a policy of cultural assimilation, whose goal was to create Black Frenchmen. In contrast, the British , perhaps out of diplomatic imperative, or a peculiarly British form of discrimination, pursued a policy of separate development, separate destiny. The sociolinguistic consequence of these separate policies is, perhaps, the unlikelihood of hearing any talk of a non-native standard

variety of French in the former French colinies, compared to the situation in the British Commonwealth.

Given the rise of non-native varieties of English, the current situation has become one in which English, while a shared language, is no longer necessarily a common language amongst its users. Because of the various systematic differences which exist between them and native-speaker models,native-speakers of English may sometimes have difficulty in understanding and using these nativized varieties of English. It is in recognition of such a problem that Trudgill and Hanna counsel that

> ...native English speakers travelling to areas such as Africa or India should make the effort to improve their comprehension of the non-native variety of English...rather than argue for a more English-type English in these areas.[6]

This last comment raises the question of language choice : the choices facing the native-speaker in situations of contact with speakers of non-native varieties of English. The choices are no different from those already identified by social psychologists have analyzed in situations of language choice. In proposing his accomodation theory, for example, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor observe that when speakers are confronted with a choice between varieties of a language, they often make their choice on a gradient ranging from convergence to divergence.[7] Native-speakers, then, may, as they already often do based on their perception of the imperatives of the interactional situation in instances of intra-national lingujistic variation, choose convergence or divergence. Whereas the ordinary native-speaker tourist on a brief visit may not feel such a need, accomodation would seem the sensible choice for the the businessman. That is to say, he should seek to understand

and use, where appropriate, the forms dictated by the local non-native circumstances. This is clearly a call for the abandonment of the frequently encountered linguistic chauvinism of Americans in favor of linguistic accomodation and convergence.

3. Analyzing Native-Speaker Learner Needs:

Having established the theoretical justification for a special ESP program, we need to address the question of determining the needs of learners. This is a necessary step since, obviously, we do not need to teach learners everything about non-native varieties of English.

Our needs-identification would be guided by how we look at the question of language. We may look at language as a system, something displaying structures at various levels such as phonology, lexis, and syntax or grammar. We may also consider language as a tool embedded in a social matrix, that is as a form of cultural behavior which both reflects and structures existing patterns of social interaction. In the latter sense, we are looking at language as a system concerned with the expression of ideas, with rhetorical and discoursal functions and rules, with speech or writing as directed to meaningful contact between human beings.

Both views are important and, to varying degrees, relevant to our concerns here. The identification of differences between several varieties of English at the systemic levels of phonology, lexis, and grammar is a task that has already been accomplished in many instances. Primarily then, we may simply extract from available data those items that we consider worthy of note. But, for questions of communicative skills, our problem is a little more complex, and deserves, perhaps, greater attention.

In analyzing learner needs in this area, the insights gleaned from the works already done on traditional LSP courses can prove quite useful. Those which are particularly useful are pragmatic analysis[8], categorization of communicative lapses and, consequently, identification of requisite communicative capabilities.

A useful preliminary step in the analysis of learner needs could be to engage in a pragmatic analysis of the types of interactional situations in which learners may be involved in the non-native English situation. This would involve the observation, collection, recording, transcription and analysis of actual behaviors of the native and non-native English speaking participants in these interactional situations. The situations may be, for example, seminars, corporation board meetings, negotiations with government officials, business dinners, social get-togethers, giving instruction to subordinates, coresponding in writing to business partners, officials, etc., or establishing and maintaning social relationships. By studying specific instances of these kinds of interactional settings, we may be able to come up with a number of principles of a high level of generalization, and determine those situations that are most frequent as well as those likely to elicit communication problems or to evoke a lack of facilitation of goals. This is improtant because communication breaks down not only when people literarily do not comprehend what is said, or are using words to mean different things, but also because different languages, or varieties of a language, may have different rules governing what is appropriate or not in given circumstances, and how to convey or not convey particular social messages.

From such identification of important interactional settings, we can them move to the categorization of communicative lapses and other problems. We

would be asking questions such as: Where has communication broken down? Where and why did we fail to elicit the desired response? These are questions that we need to ask both native-speakers of English as well as those who speak the second language variety.

From the answers to the questions above, we can them move on to identify the systematic differences in the way both sets of speakers use langauge to define relationships and achieve their communicative and other goals. Based on our understanding of such differences and the needs, we can proceed to establish target communicative capabilities that the native speaker would need in the non-native speaker situation.

4. Designing a Syllabus or Program of Instruction:

Here, we need to consider and formalize in advance the content of what we want to teach. The sequence is really of little importance. Although there are different kinds of business and degrees of necessary interaction, it is possible to have one program or syllabus for all, with the teacher emphasizing the points of interest that are more important to his group of students.

A syllabus will have to cover two sets of language skills: receptive skills and productive skills. Each of these will need to cover the structure of language and the use or functions of language. It is my belief that the emphasis on the social functions of language should receive the greater attention.

First, the structure of language. Although there are differences in syntax between native-speaker and non-native speaker varieties of English, usually as a result of the influence of the structures of the latter's native languages, such differences do not always lead to a communication breakdown. The extent of these differences also varies from place to place. Some, like the varieties

found in West Africa, do not vary much, while that in India does. For the latter reason especially, therefore, it would be worth devoting quite some attention in the program to such differences. I will illustrate first with examples of the peculiarities of West African varieties of English and, then, Indian English.

West African Varieties of English: Grammar

1. No distinction between the reflexive pronoun themselves and the reciprocal pronoun each other:

   They like themselves = They like each other.

2. Absence of infinitival to after some verbs:

   It enabled him send the letter.

3. The use of progressive aspect with have when expressing a temporary state:

   I am having a headache = I have a headache.

4. A non-English use of yes and no in answering questions:

   Hasn't he arrived at the office yet?

   (a) Yes = 'he hasn't arrived at the office yet'

   (b) No = 'he has arrived at the office'

We may also compare the following usage:

   He may not come tomorrow

   I hope so = 'I hope he will not come'

Indian English: Morphology and Grammar

1. The pluralization of many English mass nouns (especially abstract nouns):

   secrecies: 'The meeting was surrounded by secrecies'

2. The use of nouns alone which appear only in partitive phrases in native-speaker English:

   alphabets: 'He knows many alphabets already' (= Letters of the alphabet)

3. An extended use of compound formation:

key-bunch = bunch of keys

chalk-piece = piece of chalk

4. The use of nominal rather than participial forms of some words when used as adjective:

schedule flight = scheduled flight

5. Different use of some preposition in verb-preposition collocations:

to be adapted on = to be adapted to

to be baffled with = to be baffled by

to pay attention on = to pay attention to

6. The use of itself and only instead of intonation to emphasize time or place:

Can I meet with you tomorrow itself?

Now only I have understood the problem (= just now)

We arrived today only.

7. Polite use of may to express obligation:

This desk may be removed tomorrow = This desk is to be removed tomorrow.

These errors may please be corrected = These errors should be corrected.

8. The use of future forms in temporal or conditional clauses where native speakers would require non-finite forms:

If I will come, I will see you =If I come, I will see you.

9. The absence of subject-verb inversion in direct questions:

What this is made from? = What is this made from?

Lexis deserves some closer look. Some peculiarities of local usage reflect borrowings or translated usages of equivalent words from indigenous languages. Others involve coinages, or the extensions of alterations to the semantic or

grammatical functions of English in non-native varieties of English. Below are examples of some of the lexical features which should receive attention:

West African English

afternoon meal = lunch (normally eaten between 2p.m and 4p.m.)

evening meal = dinner (anytime from 6.30p.m.)

chief = traditional title holder

brother = may mean cousin, nephew, kinsman, tribesman (in addition to native-speaker usage)

sister = may mean cousin, tribeswoman, niece (in addition to native-speaker usage)

uncle = father's brother, brother, or older friend/mentor.

madam = deferential address form e.g. for addressee's wife.

long-leg = nepotism

commission = commission, bribe.

Managing Director = President of a corporation.

Director-General = Admimistrative head of government department

Commissioner = State political head of government department

Minister = Federal head of government department

again = anymore

balance = change (i.e. money returned to a customer)

carpet = linoleum

corner = bend in the road

canteen = a restaurant serving indigenous food

to hear = i.e. 'to understand' (a language) besides native-speaker usage

hot drink = alcoholic spirits, liqour

dash = to tip (verb) or a tip (noun)

sorry = an expression of sympathy to someone who has just had a mishap, sneezes, stumbles, etc.

steering = the steering wheel of a vehicle.

Indian English

1.Borrowing from Indian Languages:

crore = ten million

duri = tailor

hartal = a strike used as a political gesture

lakh = one hundred thousand

sahib = sir, master

swadeshi = indigenous, native, home-grown

2. Extension or alterations of English words, archaisims and innovations:

appreciable =appreciated

as such = consequently, therefore

backside = behind, in back of

biodata = curriculum vitae

co-brother = wife's sister's husband

colony = reidential area; apartment building

cousin-sister = female cousin

to extern = to exile, banish

hotel = restaurant, cafe (not necessarily with lodgings)

tiffin = lunch

A program coordinator may choose from readily available lists, which of these he wants to bring to the attention of his group, depending on the extent and kind of contact which is expected with non-native English users.

The level of phonolgy will, perhaps, deserve the greatest attention. It has indeed been established that much of the communication lapses deriving from language structure between native and non-native-speakers of English takes place at the level of phonology. Some of the differences responsible for this are, again illustrated below with examples from Nigerian English and Indian English:

Nigerian English:

1. Several varieties of English in West Africa normally have a reduced vowel system. Therefore, many vowel contrasts are not made:

/i/ pit, peat

/a/ pat, part, father, butter

/o/ boat

/u/ boot, put

2. Words such as button and apple do not have final syllabic consonants:

button /b tin/ (/b tn/)

apple /apul/ (/ pl/)

3. Words ending in mb (e.g. bomb, climb, plumb) may be pronounced with a final /b/. Also words ending in ng (e.g. ring, long, bang) may be pronounced with a final /ng/).

4. A number of words have different stress placement:

congratulate

investigate

madam

maintenance

recognize

success

5. West African varieties of English are typically syllable-timed rather than stress-timed. This is often the greastest cause of intelligibility problems for native-speakers of English.

Indian English displays most of the characteristics of the varieties higlighted above, except that the severity of the difficulties seem more pronounced, causing considerably greater difficulties not only for native-speakers, but speakers of other non-native varieties of English as well.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that special practice in receptive/listening skills is necessary for native-speaker who intend to operate in these environments. This can be done with the use of video and audio-taped conversations of native-speaker-non-native speaker interactions in relevant settings. Participants will react to and practice problem sounds and speech patterns.

The importance of language as a communicative/functional tool in social settings will need to be emphasized as well. Participants will need to learn what is considered communicative competence in the relevant non-native English setting. A businessman involved in negotiating a contract, or living with and dealing with non-native speakers on a daily basis needs to understand not only why people sometimes speak the way they do, but also know how ro behave with appropriate requisite courtesies.

Thus, the attention of participants should be drawn to the fact that there are significant rhetorical differences between various languages, differences which are reflected both in writing and in speech. In several linguistic traditions, for example, problems are often solved indirectly drawing upon a background context which involves the use of several proverbs, analogies, and

aphorisms. The individual voice is often submerged. Therefore, when such speaker use English they tend to transfer these rhetorical structures over into English.

Native speakers should also pay attention to address systems, greetings and elements of phatic communion. In Nigerian English, for example, titles are very important. A business deal can easily be lost to a competitor because of a failure to address the local negotiator appropriately. Professionals need to be addressed by their occupational designations, such as:

Architect, Lawyer, Professor, Doctor, Engineer, Surveyor, etc., Chief, Alhaji(male)/Alhaja(female) (a muslim who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca), etc. + Last Name.

The popular female address term, Ms, is to be scrupulously avoided.

In respect of phatic communion, the native-speaker should note that talking about the weather, or asking "How are you?" without really wanting to know how the respondent has been do not constitute social grace. On the other hand, asking about the family --the kids, wife/wives (or madam) does.

5. Conclusion:

It should be noted that the argument here has not been that it is impossible for a native-speaker to operate in the non-native-English environment without knowing all that has been discussed here. What I have tried to do is to stimulate a consideration of the kinds of problems which native-speakers may expect to find in their projected environment. Some of them are severe enough to frustrate both the native-speakers and non-native speakers as well.

Much of the success of a business interaction depends on the state of mind of the participants, as well as how they are perceived as social actors. The

way we understand and use language is a crucial factor in this situation. Thus, we need to do whatever we can to prepare our participants for the technical tasks at hand. Doing so, most certainly, gives us that edge which, sometimes, makes all the difference between success and failure. Learning to cope with problems of communication is definitely one of the ways we can do this.

NOTES

[1] Braj B. Kachru, ed., **The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures** (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

[2] L.E. Smith, ed., **English for Cross-cultural Communication** (London: Macmillan, 1981).

[3] Peter Strevens, **Teaching English as an International Language** (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), p.97.

[4] Strevens, **Teaching English**, passim.

[5] Strevens, **Teaching English**, p.92.

[6] Peter Trudgill and Jean Hanna, **International English** (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p.100.

[7] H. Giles, R. Bourhis, and D. Taylor, "Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations," in **Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations**, ed., H. Giles (London: Academic Press, 1977).

[8] C.N. Candlin, C.J. Burton, and J.L. Leather, "Doctors in Causality: Applying Communicative Competence to Components of Specialist Course Design," **IRAL XIV**, No. 3.

[9] I am indebted to Trudgil and Hanna, **International English**, for some of the entries here. Also, see R. McCrum, W. Cran, and R. MacNeil, **The Story of**

English (New York: Viking, 1986) for a particularly illuminating discussion of these new varieties of English.